

## Arguments

Do arguments have a place in society at all? Do they have a place in relationships other than the space to let off steam, to lose control, to show a strength, a depth of feeling that we might otherwise not show?

I suppose our opinion would be that, yes, they do have a place, but it's a very risky one. People use the phrase 'to clear the air', and I suppose this is a good use of an argument, but it begs the question why is the air unclear in the first place? It is our experience, both in examining the arguments of clients and in our own relationships, that an argument never actually sorted anything out.

At best an argument can allow the freedom to express strongly held feelings that would normally be hidden. So of course it is possible, in the aftermath of the argument, or when all protagonists have recovered, to revisit some of the content of the argument and look at issues that came up with a view to potentially discussing and resolving them.

It can be helpful, though, to see arguments as a symptom of problems in a relationship. By the time discussion breaks down into argument, two things are happening. Firstly, communication has ended – the arguers are out of contact with each other, and are seeing each other as someone to be controlled or someone trying to control. Secondly, any attempt at compromise has been lost – both parties are now in a win/lose situation, and for the length of the argument are unable to back down.

Generally speaking, it would seem healthier to be able to bring up difficult subjects within a discussion rather than an argument. Working on safety within a relationship, both an intimate family relationship and a psychotherapeutic relationship, allows us to talk more openly and with more purpose than when we hide much of what we want to say and are only able to speak in the heat of an argument.

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